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Crucs

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(54) **APPARATUS AND METHOD TO AID IN FINDING MISPLACED, FORGOTTEN, OR UNUSED ITEMS**

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USPC 340/3.1, 572.2, 457
See application file for complete search history.

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(57) **ABSTRACT**

Devices to aid in finding items, along with methods of operation of the devices. The resultant movement of an item during use, and lack of movement of an item during non-use, are exploited to alert a user to the whereabouts of the item through adaptive techniques. A device is associated with an item (e.g., attached to an item) and is configured to sense motion events corresponding to movement of the device and to track corresponding times of occurrence of the motion events. The device may adaptively determine a time interval of motion inactivity or an alert time at which to provide an indication of a current location of the device based on one or more of the motion events and the times of occurrence.

27 Claims, 10 Drawing Sheets

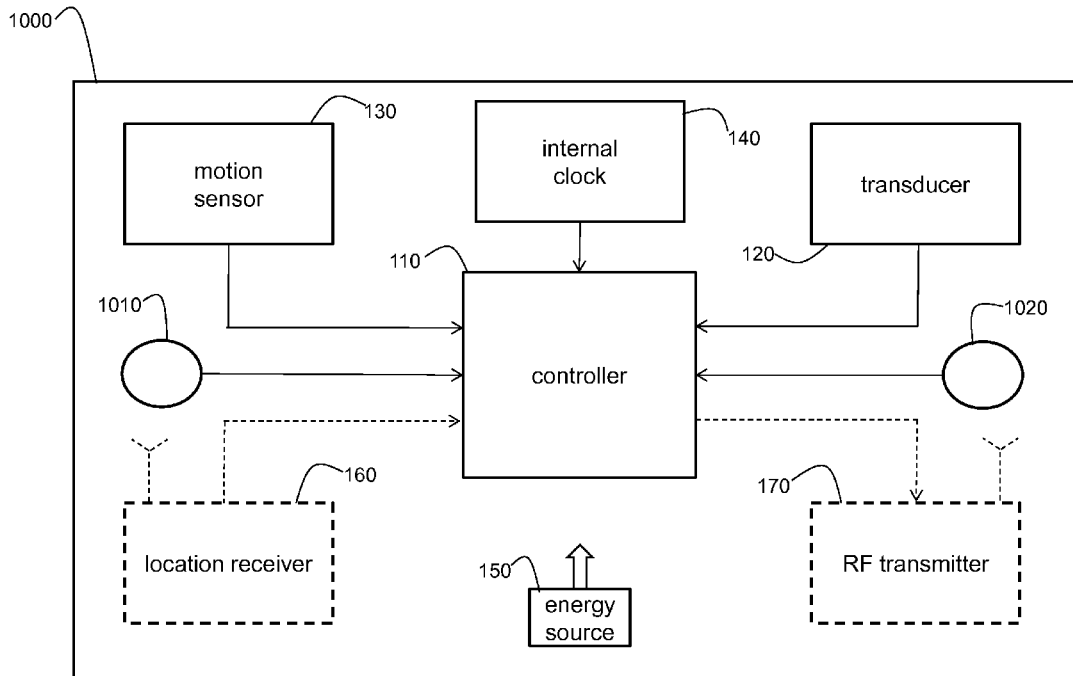


FIG. 1

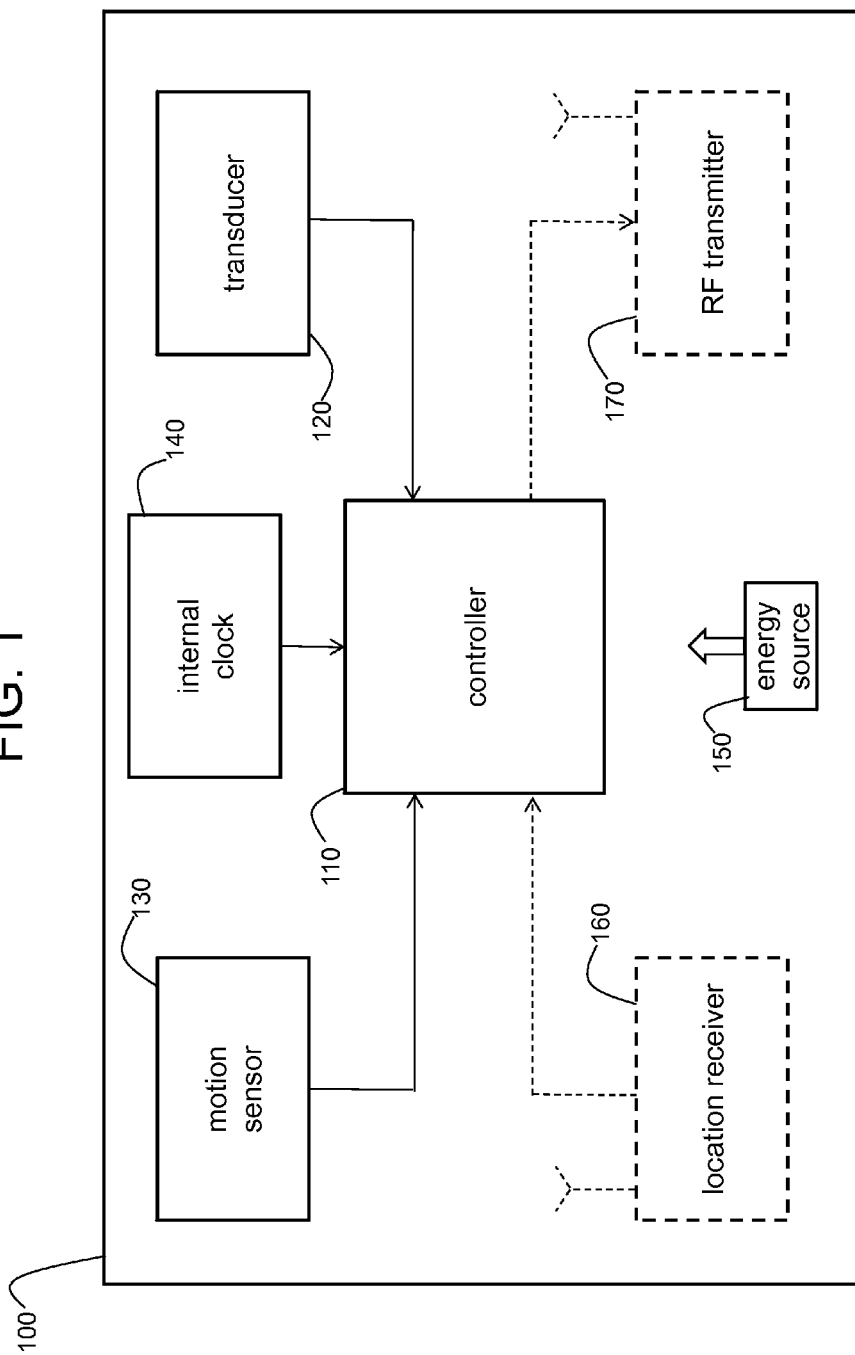
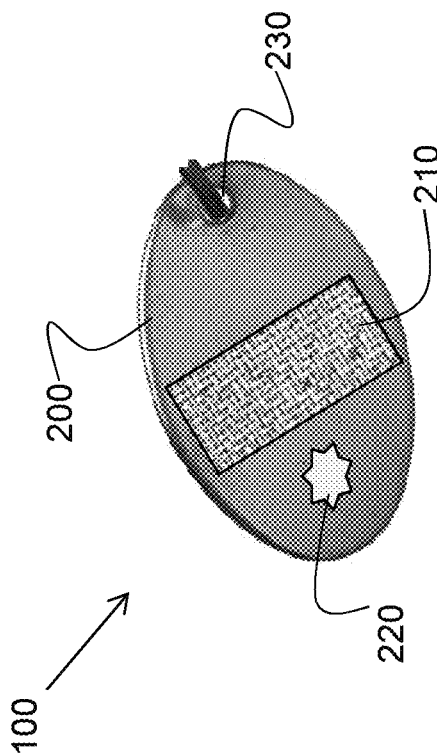


FIG. 2



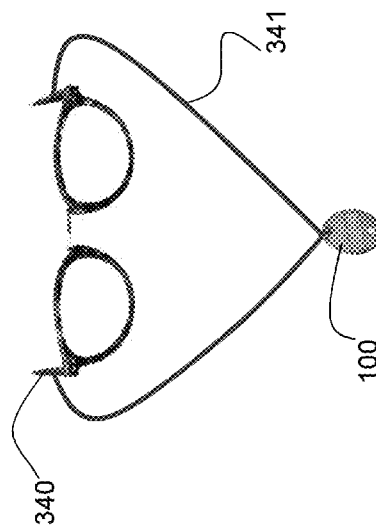
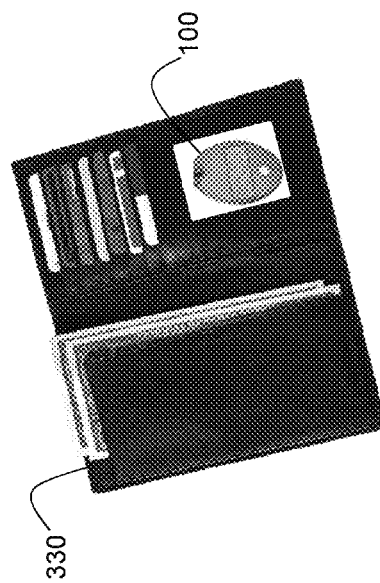
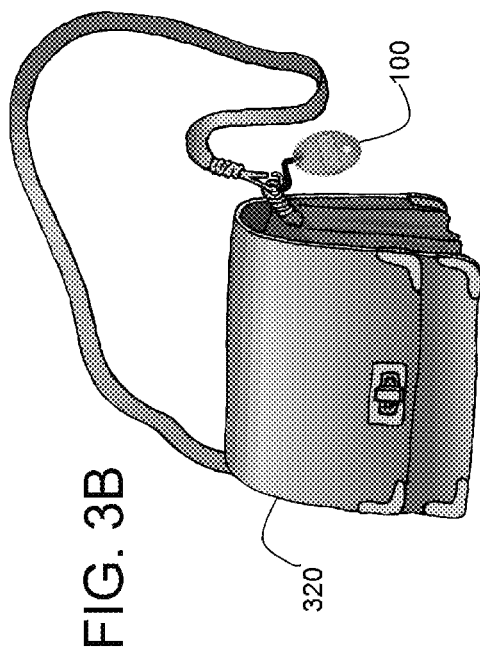
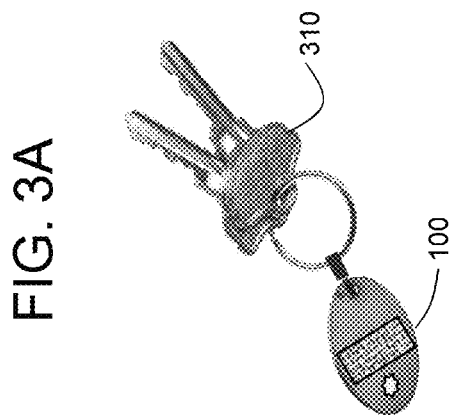


FIG. 3A

FIG. 3B

FIG. 3C

FIG. 3D

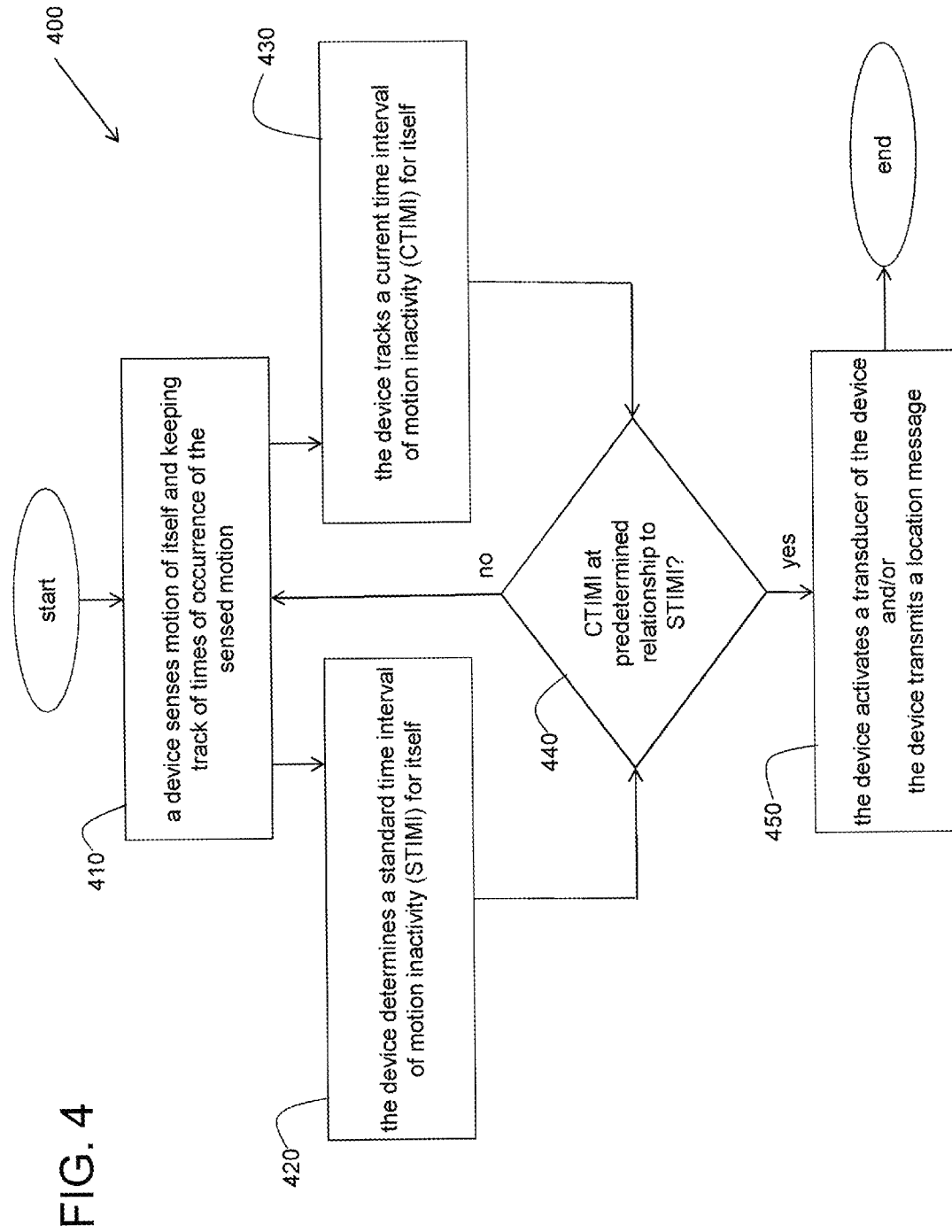


FIG. 5

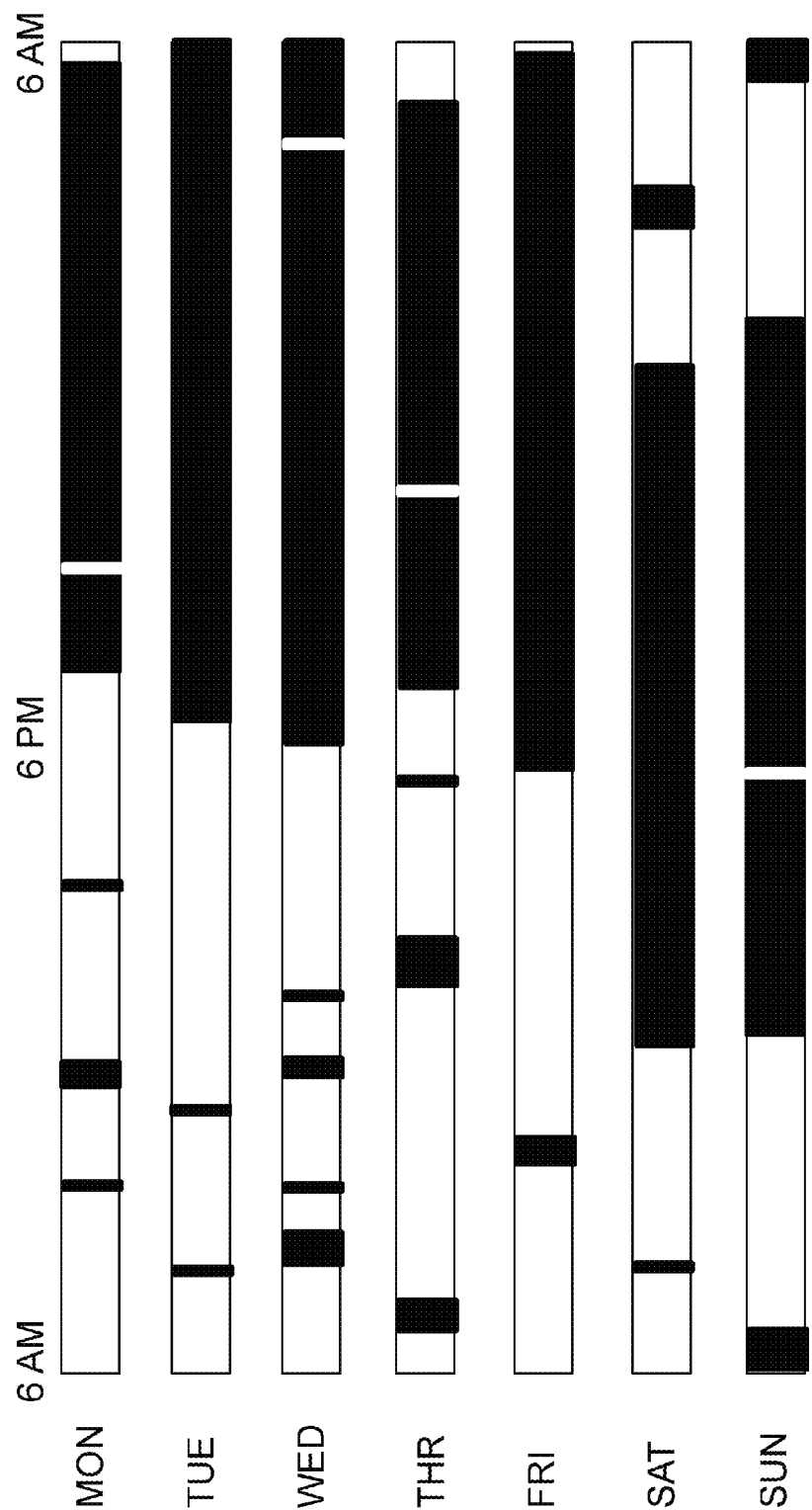


FIG. 6A

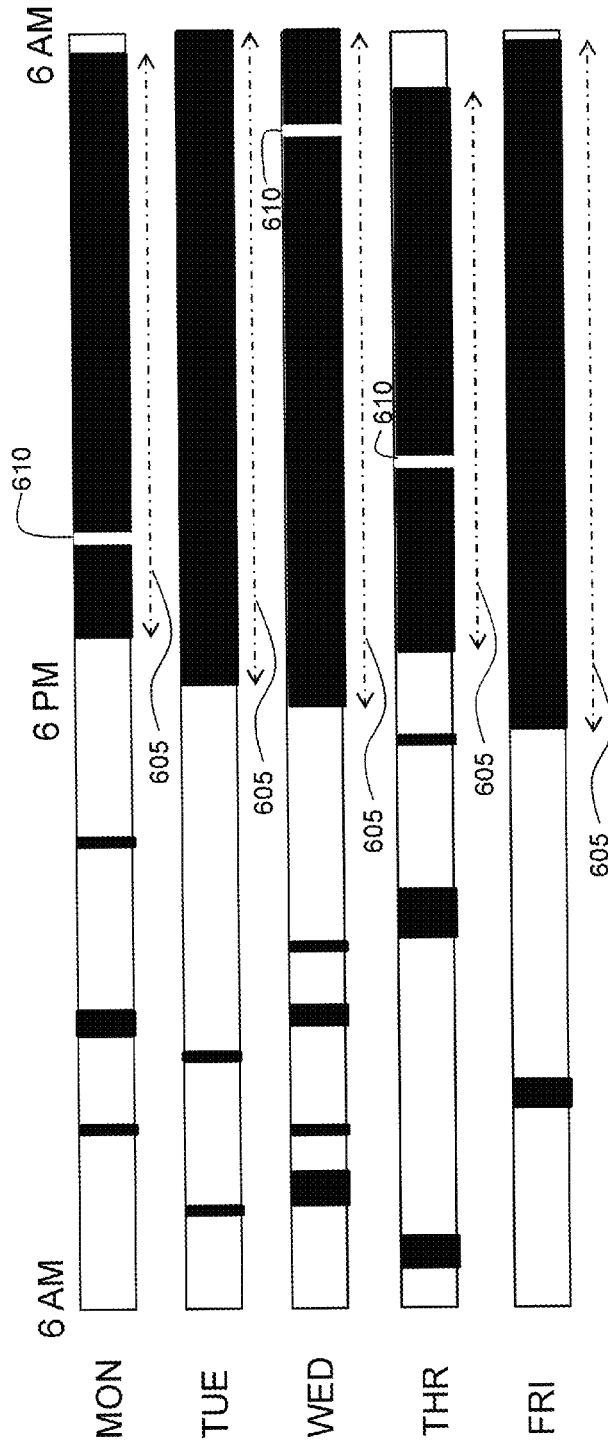


FIG. 6B

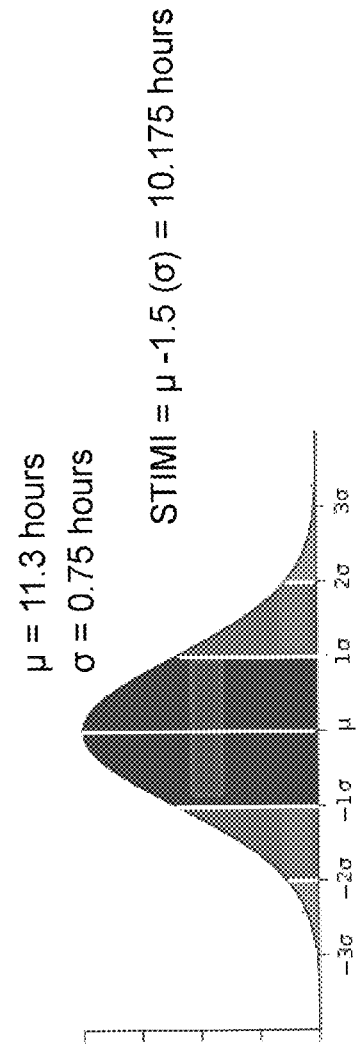
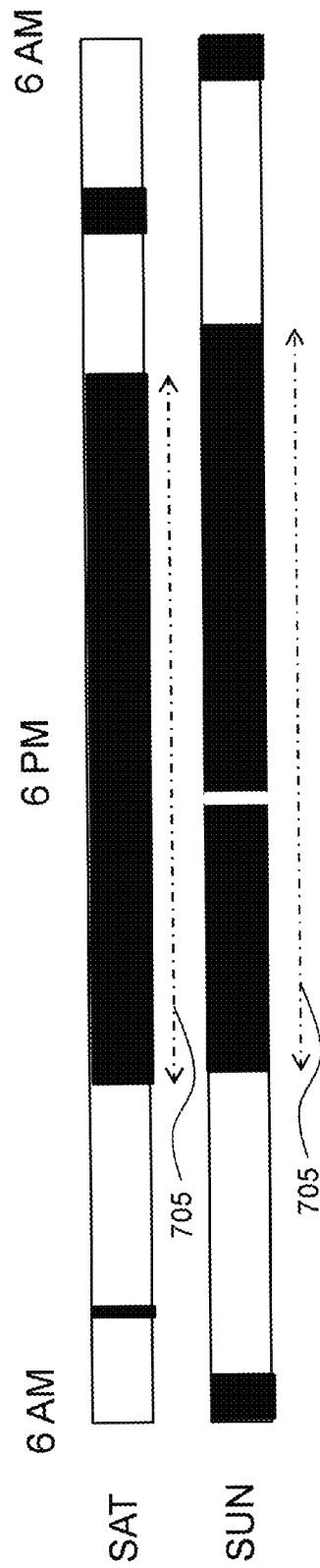


FIG. 7A



$\mu = 12.2$ hours
 $\sigma = 1.1$ hours

$STIMI = 0.85(\mu) + 0.7(\sigma) = 11.14$ hours

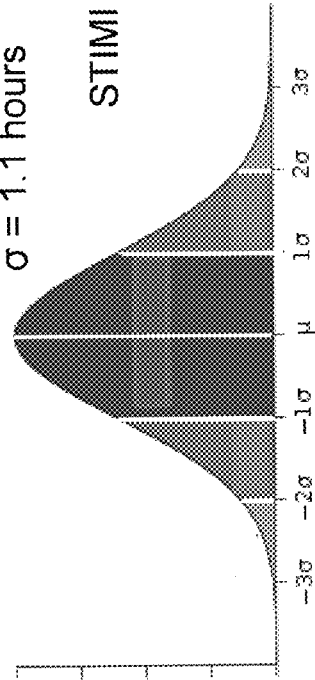
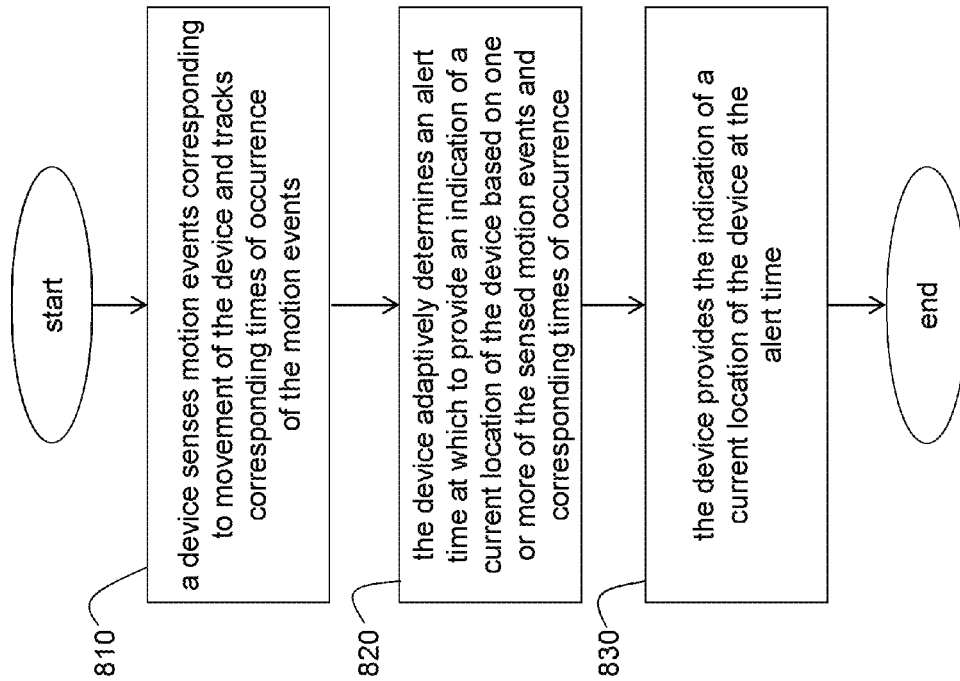


FIG. 7B

800

FIG. 8



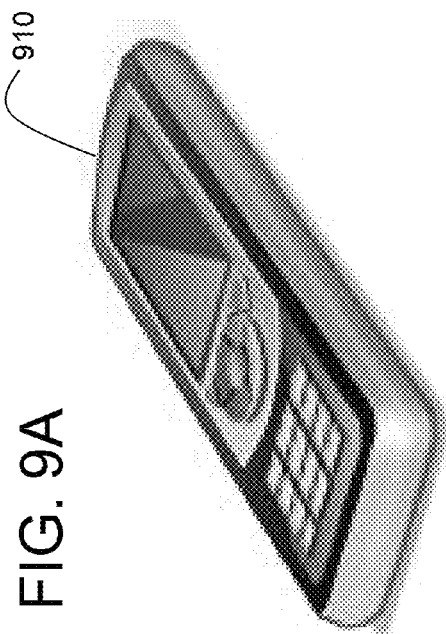
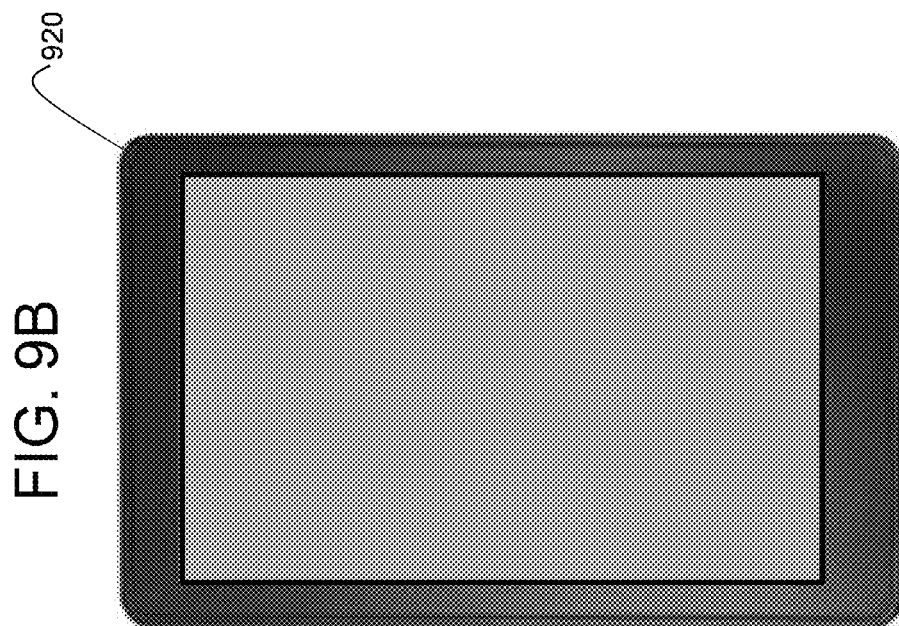
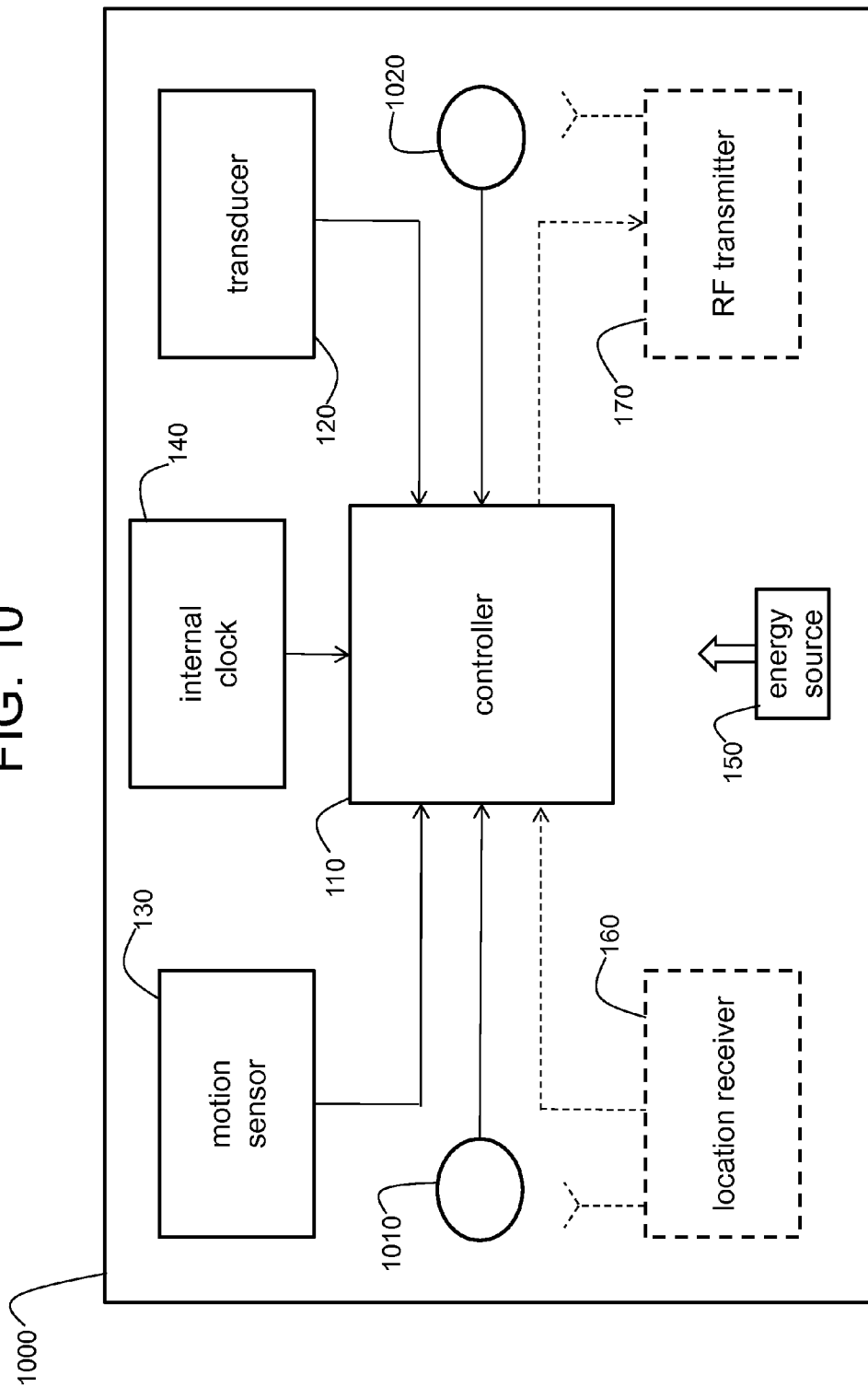


FIG. 10



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APPARATUS AND METHOD TO AID IN FINDING MISPLACED, FORGOTTEN, OR UNUSED ITEMS

TECHNICAL FIELD

Certain embodiments of the present invention relate to devices and methods for finding a misplaced, forgotten, or unused item. More particularly, certain embodiments relate to devices and methods for finding a misplaced, forgotten, or unused item by applying adaptive responses to sensed motion over time.

BACKGROUND

People often misplace items such as keys, purses, wallets, eye glasses, cell phones, as well as other items. For example, people with Alzheimer's disease or other short term memory problems may be more susceptible to forgetting where they placed an item. Keys, a wallet, or a cell phone can easily fall out of a person's pocket while sitting on furniture (e.g., a couch) at home and get lost in the joints of the upholstery without the person realizing it. It is desirable to provide a way for a person to more easily find an item that has been misplaced, forgotten, or unused for a period of time.

Further limitations and disadvantages of conventional, traditional, and proposed approaches will become apparent to one of skill in the art, through comparison of such approaches with the subject matter of the present application as set forth in the remainder of the present application with reference to the drawings.

SUMMARY

Embodiments of the present invention take advantage of the routine use of certain items by users to aid users in finding the items when misplaced, lost, forgotten, or unused for awhile. The resultant movement of an item during use, and lack of movement of an item during non-use, can be exploited to alert a user to the whereabouts of the item through adaptive techniques. The adaptive techniques are implemented in a device (or in the item itself) and allow the device (or item) to effectively learn the typical intervals of time corresponding to use and non-use of an item associated with the device. For example, when an item associated with the device has not been moved over a period of time relative to a determined standard interval of time (e.g., 12 hours), the device may trigger an audible and/or visible alarm, or may transmit a message to the user, alerting the user to the present location of the device and, therefore, the associated item. The determined standard interval of time is adaptively determined by the device based on the actual use (movement and non-movement) of the device over time and represents an estimated interval of time over which the item is expected to, for example, not be used (i.e., not be moved).

An embodiment of the present invention comprises a device to aid in finding an associated item. The device includes a controller and a transducer operatively connected to the controller. The controller may have a software programmable processor or a hardware logic controller, in accordance with various embodiments. The transducer may be an audible transducer and/or a visible light emitting transducer, in accordance with various embodiments. The device also includes a motion sensor operatively connected to the controller to provide motion information corresponding to movement of the device to the controller. For example, the motion sensor may have an accelerometer. The device further

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includes a clock operatively connected to the controller to provide timing information to the controller. The controller is configured to identify time intervals of at least one of motion activity and motion inactivity of the device based on the motion information and the timing information. The controller is further configured to adaptively operate the transducer based on one or more of the identified time intervals. The device may also include a location receiver operatively connected to the controller and configured to determine a location of the device and provide associated first location information to the controller. In accordance with an embodiment, the location receiver may be a global positioning system (GPS) receiver and the first location information may include GPS coordinate information. The device may further include a radio frequency (RF) transmitter operatively connected to the controller and configured to receive second location information from the controller, wherein the second location information is derived by the controller from the first location information, and wherein the RF transmitter is further configured to transmit the second location information as a message in an RF signal. The message may be, for example, a text message or an email message. The RF signal may be compatible with, for example, a mobile telephone network or a Wi-Fi network. The device may also include at least one energy source operatively connected to at least the controller to provide electrical energy to the controller. The energy source may provide electrical energy to other elements of the device as well such as, for example, the transducer and the motion sensor. In accordance with one embodiment, the device is configured to be attached to an item. In accordance with another embodiment, the device is integrated into an item. In accordance with an embodiment, the elements of the device are elements of a mobile telephone and the controller is configured via a downloadable software application. In accordance with another embodiment, the elements of the device are elements of a tablet computer and the controller is configured via a downloadable software application. The device may also include at least one of a thermal sensor and a photo-sensor operatively connected to the controller.

Another embodiment of the present invention comprises a method of operation of the device disclosed above. The method includes the device sensing motion events corresponding to movement of the device and tracking corresponding times of occurrence of the motion events. The method also includes the device adaptively determining a standard time interval of motion inactivity for the device based on at least a portion of the sensed motion events and the corresponding times of occurrence. The method further includes the device tracking a current time interval of motion inactivity. The method may also include the device activating a transducer of the device when the current time interval of motion inactivity is at a predetermined relationship to the standard time interval of motion inactivity. The transducer may produce an audible sound when activated or may emit a visible light when activated or both, in accordance with various embodiments. The method may further include the device wirelessly transmitting a message when the current time interval of motion inactivity is at a predetermined relationship to the standard time interval of motion inactivity, wherein the message indicates a location of the device. The message may be one of a text message or an email message, in accordance with various embodiments. The method may also include the device re-initializing itself with respect to at least the standard time interval of motion inactivity when an intensity of a sensed motion event of the sensed motion events exceeds a determined intensity threshold level. The method may further include the device sensing one or more of thermal energy

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levels and visible light levels, and times of occurrence of the sensed thermal energy levels and the sensed visible light levels. The device may adaptively determine the standard time interval of motion inactivity for the device based on at least one of the sensed motion events, the sensed thermal energy levels, the sensed visible light levels, and the corresponding times of occurrence thereof.

A further embodiment of the present invention comprises a method of operation of the device disclosed above. The method includes the device sensing motion events corresponding to movement of the device and tracking corresponding times of occurrence of the motion events. The method further includes the device adaptively determining an alert time at which to provide an indication of a current location of the device based on one or more of the sensed motion events and times of occurrence. The method may also include the device providing the indication of a current location of the device at the alert time. The indication of a current location of the device may include one or more of an audible signal, a visible signal, a text message, and an email message. The method may further include the device sensing one or more of thermal energy levels and visible light levels, and times of occurrence of the sensed thermal energy levels and the sensed visible light levels. The device may adaptively determine an alert time at which to provide an indication of a current location of the device based on one or more of the sensed motion events, the sensed thermal energy levels, the sensed visible light levels, and the corresponding times of occurrence thereof.

These and other novel features of the subject matter of the present application, as well as details of illustrated embodiments thereof, will be more fully understood from the following description and drawings.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 illustrates a schematic block diagram of an embodiment of a device to aid in finding an associated item;

FIG. 2 is an illustration of an embodiment of the device of FIG. 1;

FIGS. 3A-3D are illustrations of embodiments of the device of FIG. 2 in use when associated with various items such as keys, a purse, a wallet, and eye glasses;

FIG. 4 is a flowchart of a first embodiment of a method of operation of the device of FIG. 1 and FIG. 2;

FIG. 5 is an illustration of an example timeline covering the course of one week and showing time intervals of motion activity and motion inactivity of an item of a user during that week;

FIG. 6A is an illustration of a portion of the example timeline of FIG. 5, covering a Monday through Friday work portion of the week;

FIG. 6B is a diagram illustrating the statistical nature of the time intervals of motion inactivity of the Monday through Friday work week timelines for the item of the user (e.g., over multiple weeks, including the week shown in FIG. 6A) and an associated determination of a standard time interval of motion inactivity (STIMI);

FIG. 7A is an illustration of a portion of the example timeline of FIG. 5, covering a Saturday and Sunday weekend portion of the week;

FIG. 7B is a diagram illustrating the statistical nature of the time intervals of motion inactivity of the Saturday and Sunday weekend timelines for the item of the user (e.g., over multiple weekends, including the weekend shown in FIG. 7A) and an associated determination of a standard time interval of motion inactivity (STIMI);

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FIG. 8 is a flowchart of a second embodiment of a method of operation of the device of FIG. 1 and FIG. 2;

FIGS. 9A-9B are illustrations of embodiments of mobile devices (e.g., a cell phone and a tablet computer) which incorporate the functionality of the methods described herein; and

FIG. 10 illustrates a schematic block diagram of an alternative embodiment of a device to aid in finding an associated item.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 illustrates a schematic block diagram of an embodiment of a device **100** to aid in finding an associated item. The item may be, for example, a set of keys, a purse, a wallet, or eye glasses. The device **100** may be attached to the item or may be an integral part of the item, in accordance with various embodiments.

The device **100** includes a controller **110**. The controller **110** may have, for example, a software programmable processor, or may be a hardware logic controller. The device **100** also includes one or more transducers **120** operatively connected to the controller **110**. The transducer **120** may be, for example, an audible transducer or a visible light-emitting transducer. Use of the transducer **120** is explained in more detail later herein. The device **100** further includes a motion sensor **130** operatively connected to the controller **110** to provide motion information corresponding to movement of the device **100** to the controller **110**. The motion sensor **130** may have, for example, an accelerometer.

The device **100** also includes a clock **140** operatively connected to the controller **110** to provide timing information to the controller. The clock **140** may have, for example, a crystal oscillator providing accurate operation. The device **100** further includes an energy source **150** such as, for example, a DC battery. The energy source **150** provides electrical energy to one or more of the controller **110**, the transducer **120**, the motion sensor **130**, and the clock **140**, in accordance with various embodiments.

In accordance with an embodiment, the controller **110** is configured to identify time intervals of motion activity and/or motion inactivity of the device **100** based on the motion information provided by the motion sensor **130** and the timing information provided by the clock **140**. The controller **110** is also configured to adaptively operate the transducer **120** based on one or more of the identified time intervals. Exemplary details of such adaptive operation are provided later herein.

As an option, the device **100** may include a location receiver **160** operatively connected to the controller **110** and configured to determine a location of the device **100** and provide associated first location information to the controller **110**. In accordance with an embodiment, the location receiver **160** is a global positioning system (GPS) receiver and the first location information is GPS coordinate information. The energy source **150** can also provide electrical energy to the location receiver **160**.

Also, as an option, the device **100** may include a radio frequency (RF) transmitter **170** operatively connected to the controller **110**. The RF transmitter **170** is configured to receive second location information from the controller **110**. The second location information is derived by the controller **110** from the first location information. For example, the controller **110** may be configured to assign or map names of rooms in a user's house (second location information) to the

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GPS coordinate information (first location information). The energy source **150** can also provide electrical energy to the RF transmitter **170**.

The RF transmitter **170** is further configured to transmit the second location information as a message in an RF signal. In accordance with various embodiments, the message may be a text message or an email message, and the RF signal may be compatible with a mobile telephone network or a Wi-Fi network, for example. Other types of messages and communication networks are possible as well, in accordance with other embodiments. Use of the location receiver **160** and the RF transmitter **170** is explained in more detail later herein.

FIG. 2 is an illustration of an embodiment of the device **100** of FIG. 1. The elements of the device **100** are enclosed in a housing **200** of the device **100**. For example, the elements of FIG. 1 may be mounted on a circuit board and encased in the housing **200**. The housing **200** may be a molded plastic housing, for example. A face of the housing **200** provides a first port **210** (e.g., a plurality of small holes) through which audible sound produced by an audible transducer **120** may pass. The face of the housing **200** also provides a second port **220** (e.g., a transparent window) through which visible light produced by a visible transducer **120** may pass. The housing **200** may also have an aperture **230** configured to allow a chain or a lanyard, for example, to pass through. The chain or lanyard may be used to attach the device **100** to an item as illustrated in FIGS. 3A-3D.

FIGS. 3A-3D are illustrations of embodiments of the device **100** of FIG. 2 in use when associated with various items such as keys **310**, a purse **320**, a wallet **330**, and eye glasses **340**. As shown in FIGS. 3A-3D, the device **100** may attach to the associated item in various ways, depending on the nature of the item. For example, the device **100** attaches to the eyeglasses **340** via a lanyard **341**, whereas the device **100** attaches to the inside of the wallet **330** via an adhesive.

FIG. 4 is a flowchart of a first embodiment of a method **400** of operation of the device **100** of FIG. 1 and FIG. 2. In step **410**, the device senses motion of itself and keeps track of the times of occurrence of the sensed motion. For example, if the device **100** is attached to a set of keys **310**, the motion sensor **130** of the device **100** senses when a user is moving the set of keys **310** and reports the motion information to the controller **110**. The clock **140** is reporting time information to the controller **110** and the controller **110** correlates the sensed motion to the time information. In accordance with an embodiment, the controller **110** may be configured to effectively ignore sensed motion that is below a defined threshold and/or sensed motion that occurs infrequently.

In step **420**, the device **100** determines a standard time interval of motion inactivity (STIMI) based on the sensed motion and correlated times. For example, the STIMI may simply be an average of the various time intervals of inactivity (no significant motion) of the device **100** as calculated by the controller **110**. The concept of STIMI is discussed later herein with respect to FIGS. 6A-6B and FIGS. 7A-7B.

In step **430**, the device **100** is tracking a current time interval of motion inactivity (CTIMI) based on the sensed motion and the correlated times. That is, the device **100** keeps track of how long it has been since the device has sensed any significant amount of motion. Whether the amount of sensed motion is significant or not can depend on the intensity level of the sensed motion and the time duration over which the sensed motion is experienced. In this way, minor vibrations and inadvertent bumps experienced by an item may be ignored. For example, the controller **110** may determine that it has been 2 hours and 15 minutes, and counting, since the device

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100 has sensed any significant amount of motion (i.e., the CTIMI is 2 hours and 15 minutes and counting).

In step **440**, the CTIMI is compared to the STIMI, for example, by the controller **110**. If the CTIMI is at a predetermined relationship to the STIMI (e.g., if the CTIMI exceeds the STIMI) then, in step **450**, the controller **110** activates the transducer **120** and/or transmits a location message via the RF transmitter **170** in an attempt to alert the user to the location of the device **100** and, therefore, to the location of the associated item (e.g., the purse **320**). In accordance with an embodiment, the user may deactivate the transducer of the device by moving the device when found. If the CTIMI is not at the predetermined relationship to the STIMI, then the device **100** continues to sense motion (if present), determine (e.g., update) the STIMI, and track the CTIMI in steps **410**, **420**, and **430**.

If the transducer is an audible transducer, the volume of the emitted sound may slowly get louder over time after the transducer is activated, until reaching some maximum volume level. Similarly, the types of sound emitted by the audible transducer may change over time. Such changes of volume level and sound type over time may help the user find the associated item. Furthermore, in accordance with an embodiment, the controller **110** may be configured to ignore any vibrations produced by the audible transducer which are sensed by the motion sensor **130**.

FIG. 5 is an illustration of an example timeline covering the course of one week and showing time intervals of motion activity and motion inactivity of an item of a user during that week based on operation of an associated device **100**. The timeline shows a 24 hour period starting at 6:00 a.m. for each day of the week, Monday through Sunday, and ending at 6:00 a.m. the following day. The white intervals of time indicate time intervals of motion activity of the item, and the black intervals of time indicate time intervals of motion inactivity of the item. As can be seen from FIG. 5, the work week days, Monday through Friday, have similar time intervals of motion activity and inactivity, though not identical. Similarly, the weekend days, Saturday and Sunday, have similar time intervals of motion activity and inactivity, though not identical.

For example, on Monday through Friday, there is mostly motion activity from about 6:00 a.m. to about 6:00 p.m., and mostly motion inactivity from about 6:00 p.m. to 6:00 a.m. the following morning. This may correspond to, for example, a user's use of his eyeglasses during the day while at work, and non-use of his eyeglasses while at home or asleep. On Saturday and Sunday, the user's use of his eyeglasses tends to follow a different pattern largely because the user does not typically go to work on those weekend days.

FIG. 6A is an illustration of a portion of the example timeline of FIG. 5, covering a Monday through Friday work portion of the week. In accordance with an embodiment, the controller **110** of the device largely ignores the relatively brief intervals of motion inactivity from about 6:00 a.m. to about 6:00 p.m., and focuses on the relatively long intervals of motion inactivity from about 6:00 p.m. to about 6:00 a.m. the following day. As such, the controller **110** estimates a time interval of motion inactivity **605** for each day, Monday through Friday, as indicated by the dashed/dotted arrows in FIG. 6A. Furthermore, the controller **110** may have been making such estimates for many previous workdays of previous weeks and using all of the time interval of motion inactivity information to determine the statistical nature of the information. In accordance with an embodiment, the relatively brief intervals of motion activity **610** are ignored by the controller **110** as being anomalies and, therefore, are treated as motion inactivity for the purpose of determining the time intervals of motion inactivity **605**.

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For example, FIG. 6B is a diagram illustrating the statistical nature of the time intervals of motion inactivity of the Monday through Friday work week timelines for the item of the user (e.g., over multiple weeks, including the week shown in FIG. 6A) and an associated determination of a standard time interval of motion inactivity (STIMI). The mean, μ , (e.g., 11.3 hours) and the standard deviation, σ , (e.g., 0.75 hours) of the time intervals of motion inactivity are determined by the controller 110. The controller 110 then determines the STIMI according to the formula:

$$\text{STIMI} = \mu - 1.5(\sigma) \quad (1)$$

which yields $\text{STIMI} = 11.3 - 1.5(0.75) = 10.175$ hours. The formula (1) may have been derived apriori from a set of training data or from some other empirical information for the item, for example, and implemented in the controller 110 (e.g., as software instructions). Other formulas, equations, or rules are possible as well, in accordance with other embodiments.

As more information is collected over time, the controller 110 adaptively updates the statistics and the STIMI such that the STIMI reflects all of the usage information of the item. In this manner, the device effectively “learns” the usage patterns of the item. In accordance with an embodiment, a weighting scheme may be implemented which, for example, weights the more recent information more heavily than the older information, causing the STIMI to be more representative of the recent usage of the item.

The controller 110 of the device 100 also tracks, in real time, the current time interval of motion inactivity (CTIMI) and compares the CTIMI to the STIMI. Again, the CTIMI is essentially how long it has been since the device 100 has sensed any significant amount of motion. In the example of FIG. 6B, the STIMI is determined to be 10.175 hours. In accordance with an embodiment, when the CTIMI exceeds 10.175 hours, the controller 110 activates the transducer 120 and/or sends a message via the RF transmitter 170 (e.g., to a mobile device of the user) to alert a user to the location of the item associated with the device. In such an embodiment, the STIMI serves as a threshold value.

In accordance with an embodiment, the device 100 may also take into account the actual day or days of the week and the actual time of day over which a CTIMI occurs. For example, the STIMI of FIG. 6B is for the days Monday through Friday and excludes Saturdays and Sundays. Furthermore, if the user were to stay home ill on a particular Wednesday, an entire 24 hour period for an item may be mostly inactive even though the controller 110 is expecting a significant amount of motion activity from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. In such a scenario, the controller may ignore or throw out the data over that particular 24 hour period and, therefore, not factor it into the calculation of STIMI. Furthermore, certain embodiments may take into account the time of the year. For example, a device that is associated with swimming goggles may only operate to alert a user during the months of May through September (the only months that the user would use the swimming goggles), and may remain in an inactive hibernation mode for the other months of October through April. Other time-of-the-year scenarios are possible as well.

FIG. 7A is an illustration of a portion of the example timeline of FIG. 5, covering a Saturday and Sunday weekend portion of the week. In accordance with FIG. 7A, the time intervals of motion inactivity 705 are from about 12:00 noon to about 12:00 midnight. This may be due to the user having a very different schedule of activity on the weekend with respect to the work week. For example, on the weekend, the user may often socialize from about 12:00 midnight to about 6:00 a.m., and then may help his son deliver newspapers

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between anytime from about 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 noon. The user may tend to sleep at home between anytime from about 12:00 noon to about 12:00 midnight.

FIG. 7B is a diagram illustrating the statistical nature of the time intervals of motion inactivity 705 of the Saturday and Sunday weekend timelines for the item of the user (e.g., over multiple weekends, including the weekend shown in FIG. 7A) and an associated determination of a standard time interval of motion inactivity (STIMI). The mean, μ , (e.g., 12.2 hours) and the standard deviation, σ , (e.g., 1.1 hours) of the time intervals of motion inactivity 705 are determined by the controller 110. The controller 110 then determines the STIMI according to the formula:

$$\text{STIMI} = 0.85(\mu) + 0.7(\sigma) \quad (2)$$

which yields $\text{STIMI} = 0.85(12.2) + 0.7(1.1) = 11.14$ hours. The formula (2) may have been derived apriori from a set of training data or from some other empirical information for the item, for example, and implemented in the controller 110 (e.g., as firmware instructions). Other formulas, equations, or rules are possible as well, in accordance with other embodiments.

Again, as more information is collected over time, the controller 110 adaptively updates the statistics and the STIMI such that the STIMI reflects all of the usage information of the item. In accordance with an embodiment, a weighting scheme may be implemented which, for example, weights the more recent information more heavily than the older information, causing the STIMI to be more representative of the recent usage of the item.

The controller 110 of the device 100 also tracks, in real time, the current time interval of motion inactivity (CTIMI) and compares the CTIMI to the STIMI. Again, the CTIMI is essentially how long it has been since the device 100 has sensed any significant amount of motion. In the example of FIG. 7B, the STIMI is determined to be 11.14 hours. In accordance with an embodiment, when the CTIMI comes within 1 hour of the STIMI, the controller 110 activates the transducer 120 and/or sends a message via the RF transmitter 170 (e.g., to a mobile device of the user) to alert a user to the location of the item associated with the device.

In accordance with an embodiment, the device 100 may be reset or reinitialized with respect to at least the STIMI when an intensity of a sensed motion event exceeds a determined intensity threshold value. For example, a user may reset the device 100 by violently shaking the device 100 for at least three seconds. Such resetting causes the device to effectively start over with respect to learning the usage patterns of an item associated with the device 100. However, upon reset, a default period of time (e.g., 12 hours) may be used as the STIMI, for example, until the device can accumulate enough new data to make a proper determination of STIMI based on actual usage (e.g., over several days).

FIG. 8 is a flowchart of a second embodiment of a method 800 of operation of the device 100 of FIG. 1 and FIG. 2. In step 810, the device senses motion events corresponding to movement of the device, and tracks corresponding times of occurrence of the motion events. In step 820, the device adaptively determines an alert time at which to provide an indication of a current location of the device based on one or more of the sensed motion events and corresponding times of occurrence. In step 830, the device provides the indication of a current location of the device at the alert time.

As an example of the method 800 of FIG. 8, a user has a device 100 inside his wallet 330 (e.g., in a compartment of the wallet). The user keeps his wallet in his back pocket during the day and takes it out of his pocket and places it on his night

stand at night. As a result, when the user has the wallet in his back pocket, the device registers many instances of movement as the user moves about during the day, even if the movement is simply the user moving around in his chair at work. Any current time intervals of motion inactivity (CTIMI) during the day tend to be relatively short. At night, however, when the wallet is on the night stand, the device registers little or no movement. Therefore, the CTIMI's tend to be much longer at night.

Based on the large amount of activity during the day and the little, if any, amount of activity at night, the controller 110 of the device determines an alert time of 7:00 a.m. at which to provide an indication of a current location of the wallet. If the user has not moved his wallet by 7:00 a.m., the device 100 activates the audio transducer 120 and/or sends a message (e.g., a text message or an email message) to the user (e.g., to a mobile device of the user) to aid the user in finding (or remembering to take) his wallet. For example, the user may occasionally leave his wallet somewhere other than the night-stand (e.g., in the kitchen) and forget that he left it there.

In accordance with an embodiment, the alert time is adaptive and may be based on a plurality of days of sensing motion events of the wallet and determining time intervals of activity and/or inactivity (e.g., based on statistical information). In determining the alert time, the controller 110 is using not only the durations of the time intervals, but also the absolute times over which the time intervals occur. For example a particular time interval of motion inactivity may have a duration of 16 minutes and may have occurred between 9:25 a.m. and 9:41 a.m.

The device 100 may be reset or reinitialized with respect to at least alert time when an intensity of a sensed motion event exceeds a determined intensity threshold value. For example, a user may reset the device 100 by violently shaking the device 100 for several seconds. Such resetting causes the device to effectively start over with respect to learning the usage patterns of an item associated with the device 100. However, upon reset, one or more default alert times may be provided (e.g., 6:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m.), for example, until the device can accumulate enough new data to make a proper determination of alert time based on actual usage (e.g., over several days).

FIGS. 9A-9B are illustrations of embodiments of mobile devices (e.g., a cell phone 910 and a tablet computer 920) which incorporate the functionality of the methods described herein. For example, an embodiment of the method 400 of FIG. 4 or an embodiment of the method 800 of FIG. 8 may be implemented on the mobile device of FIG. 9A or FIG. 9B by, for example, downloading an application to the mobile device. The elements of the device 100, as shown in FIG. 1, are pre-existing, integral elements of the mobile device, in accordance with an embodiment. The controller 110 of the mobile device is configured by the downloaded application to perform the functions of the method(s).

FIG. 10 illustrates a schematic block diagram of an alternative embodiment of a device 1000 to aid in finding an associated item. The device 1000 not only includes the motion sensor 130, but also includes a thermal sensor 1010 and a photo-sensor 1020, both operatively connected to the controller 110. The thermal sensor 1010 is configured to sense heat (e.g., infrared energy) and the photo-sensor 1020 is configured to sense visible light. Therefore, in addition to sensed motion, the device 1000 may also factor in sensed levels of thermal energy and sensed levels of visible light to make determinations of use and non-use of an associated item.

For example, in accordance with an embodiment, the device 1000 may be associated with a wallet. The wallet and the associated device tends to increase in temperature when worn in a back pocket of the user due to the user's body heat.

The thermal sensor 1010 can sense the increase in temperature and the controller 110 can use the resultant information from the thermal sensor as a primary indicator of use of the wallet by the user. Information from the motion sensor 130 may be used as back-up or supplemental information, or may not be used at all, in accordance with various embodiments.

As another example, in accordance with an embodiment, the device 1000 may be associated with an item that tends to be used at night by a user while sleeping, such as a sleep mask. In such an embodiment, the controller 110 may be configured to process information from the motion sensor 130 (as the user intermittently moves around during sleep) during night-time hours when it is dark outside and the lights are out, and ignore information from the motion sensor 130 during daylight hours, or when the lights are on. The information from the photo-sensor 1020 can be used by the controller 110 to discriminate between the awake daylight hours and the sleeping night-time hours of the user.

In accordance with various embodiments, a device may include all three sensors (motion, thermal, photo), only two of the sensors, or only one of the sensors. In accordance with various other embodiments, a device may include all three sensors (motion, thermal, photo) but be configured to use only one or two of the sensors based on a particular application of the device with an associated item.

In summary, devices to aid in finding items are disclosed, along with methods of operation of the devices. The resultant movement of an item during use, and lack of movement of an item during non-use, are exploited to alert a user to the whereabouts of the item through adaptive techniques. A device is associated with an item (e.g., attached to an item) and is configured to sense motion events corresponding to movement of the device and to track corresponding times of occurrence of the motion events. The device may adaptively determine a time interval of motion inactivity or an alert time at which to provide an indication of a current location of the device based on one or more of the motion events and the times of occurrence.

In the appended claims, the terms "including" and "having" are used as the plain language equivalents of the term "comprising"; the term "in which" is equivalent to "wherein." Moreover, in the following claims, the terms "first," "second," "third," "upper," "lower," "bottom," "top," etc. are used merely as labels, and are not intended to impose numerical or positional requirements on their objects. Further, the limitations of the following claims are not written in means-plus-function format and are not intended to be interpreted based on 35 U.S.C. §112, sixth paragraph, unless and until such claim limitations expressly use the phrase "means for" followed by a statement of function void of further structure. As used herein, an element or step recited in the singular and proceeded with the word "a" or "an" should be understood as not excluding plural of said elements or steps, unless such exclusion is explicitly stated. Furthermore, references to "one embodiment" of the present invention are not intended to be interpreted as excluding the existence of additional embodiments that also incorporate the recited features. Moreover, unless explicitly stated to the contrary, embodiments "comprising," "including," or "having" an element or a plurality of elements having a particular property may include additional such elements not having that property. Moreover, certain embodiments may be shown as having like or similar elements, however, this is merely for illustration purposes, and

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such embodiments need not necessarily have the same elements unless specified in the claims.

As used herein, the terms “may” and “may be” indicate a possibility of an occurrence within a set of circumstances; a possession of a specified property, characteristic or function; and/or qualify another verb by expressing one or more of an ability, capability, or possibility associated with the qualified verb. Accordingly, usage of “may” and “may be” indicates that a modified term is apparently appropriate, capable, or suitable for an indicated capacity, function, or usage, while taking into account that in some circumstances the modified term may sometimes not be appropriate, capable, or suitable. For example, in some circumstances an event or capacity can be expected, while in other circumstances the event or capacity cannot occur—this distinction is captured by the terms “may” and “may be.”

This written description uses examples to disclose the invention, including the best mode, and also to enable one of ordinary skill in the art to practice the invention, including making and using any devices or systems and performing any incorporated methods. The patentable scope of the invention is defined by the claims, and may include other examples that occur to those skilled in the art. Such other examples are intended to be within the scope of the claims if they have structural elements that do not differentiate from the literal language of the claims, or if they include equivalent structural elements with insubstantial differences from the literal language of the claims.

While the claimed subject matter of the present application has been described with reference to certain embodiments, it will be understood by those skilled in the art that various changes may be made and equivalents may be substituted without departing from the scope of the claimed subject matter. In addition, many modifications may be made to adapt a particular situation or material to the teachings of the claimed subject matter without departing from its scope. Therefore, it is intended that the claimed subject matter not be limited to the particular embodiments disclosed, but that the claimed subject matter will include all embodiments falling within the scope of the appended claims.

What is claimed is:

1. A device to aid in finding an associated item, said device comprising:

- a controller;
- a transducer operatively connected to said controller;
- a motion sensor operatively connected to said controller to provide motion information corresponding to movement of said device to said controller; and
- a clock operatively connected to said controller to provide timing information to said controller;
- said device sensing motion events corresponding to movement of said device and tracking corresponding times of occurrence of said motion events;
- said device adaptively determining a standard time interval of motion inactivity for said device based on at least a portion of said motion events and said corresponding times of occurrence;
- said device tracking a current time interval of motion inactivity;
- said device re-initializing itself with respect to at least said standard time interval of motion inactivity when an intensity of a sensed motion event of said sensed motion events exceeds a determined intensity threshold level; and
- said controller is configured to adaptively operate said transducer based on said current time interval of motion inactivity.

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2. The device of claim 1, wherein said motion sensor comprises an accelerometer.

3. The device of claim 1, wherein said transducer comprises at least one of an audible transducer and a visible light-emitting transducer.

4. The device of claim 1, wherein said controller comprises one of a software programmable processor and a hardware logic controller.

5. The device of claim 1, further comprising a location receiver operatively connected to said controller and configured to determine a location of said device and provide associated first location information to said controller.

6. The device of claim 5, wherein said location receiver comprises a global positioning system (GPS) receiver and wherein said first location information comprises GPS coordinate information.

7. The device of claim 5, further comprising a radio frequency (RF) transmitter operatively connected to said controller and configured to receive second location information from said controller, wherein said second location information is derived by said controller from said first location information, and wherein said RF transmitter is further configured to transmit said second location information as a message in an RF signal.

8. The device of claim 7, wherein said message is a text message and said RF signal is compatible with a mobile telephone network.

9. The device of claim 7, wherein said message is an email message and said RF signal is compatible with a Wi-Fi network.

10. The device of claim 1, further comprising at least one energy source operatively connected to at least said controller to provide electrical energy to said controller.

11. The device of claim 10, wherein said energy source is further operatively connected to at least one of said transducer and said motion sensor.

12. The device of claim 1, wherein said device is configured to be attached to an item.

13. The device of claim 1, wherein said device is integrated into an item.

14. The device of claim 1, wherein said controller, said transducer, said motion sensor, and said clock are elements of a mobile telephone, and wherein said controller is configured via a downloadable software application.

15. The device of claim 1, wherein said controller, said transducer, said motion sensor, and said clock are elements of a tablet computer, and wherein said controller is configured via a downloadable software application.

16. The device of claim 1, further comprising at least one of a thermal sensor and a photo-sensor operatively connected to the controller.

17. A method of operation of the device of claim 1, said method comprising:

- sensing motion events corresponding to movement of said device and tracking corresponding times of occurrence of said motion events; and
- determining adaptively an alert time at which to provide an indication of a current location of said device based on one or more of said motion events and said corresponding times of occurrence.

18. The method of claim 17, further comprising providing said indication of a current location of said device at said alert time.

19. The method of claim 17, wherein said indication of a current location of said device includes one or more of an audible signal, a visible signal, a text message, and an email message.

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20. The method of claim 17, further comprising:
 sensing one or more of thermal energy levels and visible
 light levels, and times of occurrence of said thermal
 energy levels and said visible light levels; and
 determining adaptively an alert time at which to provide an
 indication of a current location of said device based on
 one or more of said motion events, said thermal energy
 levels, said visible light levels, and said corresponding
 times of occurrence.
21. A method of operation of a device, said method comprising:
 sensing motion events corresponding to movement of said
 device and tracking corresponding times of occurrence
 of said motion events;
 determining adaptively a standard time interval of motion
 inactivity for said device based on at least a portion of
 said motion events and said corresponding times of
 occurrence;
 tracking a current time interval of motion inactivity; and
 re-initializing said device with respect to at least said standard
 time interval of motion inactivity when an intensity
 of a sensed motion event of said sensed motion events
 exceeds a determined intensity threshold level.
22. The method of claim 21, further comprising activating
 a transducer of said device when said current time interval of

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motion inactivity is at a predetermined relationship to said
 standard time interval of motion inactivity.

23. The method of claim 22, wherein said transducer produces
 an audible sound when activated.

24. The method of claim 22, wherein said transducer emits
 a visible light when activated.

25. The method of claim 21, further comprising transmitting
 wirelessly a message when said current time interval of
 motion inactivity is at a predetermined relationship to said
 standard time interval of motion inactivity, and wherein said
 message indicates a location of said device.

26. The method of claim 25, wherein said message is one of
 a text message and an email message.

27. The method of claim 21, further comprising:
 sensing one or more of thermal energy levels and visible
 light levels, and times of occurrence of said thermal
 energy levels and said visible light levels; and
 determining adaptively said standard time interval of
 motion inactivity for said device based on at least one of
 said motion events, said thermal energy levels, said visible
 light levels, and said corresponding times of occurrence.

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